

**US DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
NATIONAL CEMETERY ADMINISTRATION**

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
for
JACKSONVILLE AREA NATIONAL CEMETERY**

March 2006

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 and implementing regulations contained in 40 Code of Federal Regulations 1500-1508, the US Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) has prepared an environmental assessment (EA) for the construction and operation of a new national cemetery in Jacksonville, Florida. The purpose and need for the proposed action is to comply with the National Cemetery Expansion Act of 2003 (Public Law 108-109), which directs the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish six new national cemeteries, including one in the Jacksonville area. The proposed cemetery will be developed in phases, starting in 2008. At build-out, in 2030, it will accommodate 25,000 gravesites, including casketed remains sites and cremated remains sites. The first interments are expected to take place in 2009.

Alternatives and Impacts

The DVA originally considered 14 potential cemetery sites in northeast Florida. After an initial selection process, as documented in the EA, DVA retained two sites located in north Jacksonville for further consideration: the “City Site,” a 568-acres property on Lannie Road presently owned by the City of Jacksonville; and the “Wright Site,” a privately-owned, 724-acre tract, also located on Lannie Road. In addition to the No Action Alternative, the EA evaluates the following alternatives:

- Construct and operate the proposed cemetery on the Wright Site (Wright Alternative)
- Construct and operate the proposed cemetery on the portion of the City Site located north of Lannie Road (City North Alternative)
- Construct and operate the proposed cemetery on the portion of the City Site located south of Lannie Road (City South Alternative)
- Realign the portion of Lannie Road that traverses the City Site to the south of its current location and construct and operate the proposed cemetery on the City Site north of the realigned road (Lannie Road Realigned Alternative)

As documented in the EA, none of the alternatives would result in significant adverse impacts on the environment. The action alternatives would have no or negligible adverse impacts on the following: land use, socioeconomic, Environmental Justice, utilities, community services, transportation, cultural resources, air quality, noise, geology, surface and ground water, floodplains, and hazardous waste.

Under the City North Alternative, land occupied by a model airfield and the area over which users fly their model aircraft would be needed for development of the proposed cemetery. This

adverse impact would be mitigated by relocating the facility to an appropriate new location in cooperation with Jacksonville's Department of Parks, Recreation, and Entertainment, and in consultation with the current users of the site. This minor adverse impact would not occur under the other alternatives.

Under all action alternatives, there would be some changes to the selected site's topography because future burial areas would have to be elevated with fill to ensure burials remain above the high water table. Adverse impacts on stormwater due to the increase in impervious surfaces would be mitigated by construction and operation of a permitted stormwater management system. Impacts would be minor.

Under all action alternatives, the future cemetery site would include wetlands. DVA would design the cemetery to minimize impacts to these wetlands and development would be limited to upland areas as much as possible. However, while there are enough upland areas to accommodate all program requirements under any alternative, the distribution of uplands and wetlands across the sites would make it unavoidable to fill some wetlands, for instance to construct connecting roads. DVA would be required to obtain confirmation by the US Corps of Engineers (USACE) and the St. Johns River Water Management District (SJRWMD) of the wetland delineation conducted in 2005 for the EA, and to file a *Joint Application for an Environmental Resource Permit* with both agencies. Adverse impacts would be mitigated in consultation with the USACE and SJRWMD. Following implementation of mitigation measures, impacts would be minimal and not significant.

There would be moderate (Wright Alternative) or minor (other action alternatives) impacts to wildlife and vegetation, partially offset by the creation of new habitat for landscaping and/or wetland mitigation purposes; therefore, impacts would not be significant. Under all action alternatives, a survey may be needed to establish whether wood storks, a federally listed endangered species, are using the site to forage. During the master planning and design process, DVA would consult with the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the Florida Wildlife Commission to identify and mitigate any potential impacts the proposed action might have on the wood stork. The wood stork favors marshy and wet areas that, if present on the selected site, would mostly remain undeveloped and available for use by the stork. No adverse effects on the wood stork are expected. No other federally-listed species are likely to be present on the potential sites. The alternatives would have no significant adverse effects on endangered and threatened species.

A survey may be needed to establish whether any state-listed species occur on the selected site. If the presence of state-listed species were established, DVA would work in consultation with the Florida Wildlife Commission to develop avoidance, minimization, or mitigation strategies. Any impacts to state-listed species, therefore, would be minor and not significant.

Under all action alternatives, there would be construction-related, short-term, adverse impacts on air quality, noise, and stormwater. These temporary impacts would be minimized through the use of standard best management practices. Because construction of the cemetery would require disturbing more than five acres, DVA would need to obtain from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection a *Generic Permit for Stormwater Discharge from Large and Small Construction Activities*.

Finding of No Significant Impact

After reviewing the EA, and based on the analyses it contains, DVA has concluded that implementation of any of the action alternatives would not have any significant impacts on the quality of the human environment within the meaning of Section 102(2c) of NEPA. Implementation of the proposed action under any of the alternatives is unlikely to generate substantial public controversy. Therefore, preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required.

The EA and FONSI are available for public review and comments for 30 days from March 7, 2006. DVA will not proceed with the proposed action until the comment period closes. Copies of the EA and FONSI are available for public review until April 7, 2006 at the following locations (all in Jacksonville, FL): Bradham Brooks Northwest Regional Library, 1755 Edgewood Ave W; Highlands Regional Library, 1826 Dunn Avenue; and Main Library, 303 North Laura Street. The EA and FONSI are also available on the Internet at: <http://www.cem.va.gov/whatsnew.htm>. Requests for single copies of the EA and FONSI as well as all comments and questions should be addressed to:

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